# Flashback

*Journal of the Washington County Historical Society*
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Winter 2023

## Women's Clubs

### *Study, Camaraderie, and Civic Action*

# Washington County Historical Society

118 East Dickson Street, Fayetteville, AR 72701
http://www.washcohistoricalsociety.org
(479) 521-2970
Office Manager: Lauri Schroll

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Journal of the Washington County Historical Society

*Preserving our past for future generations*

Volume 73 Winter 2023 Number 4


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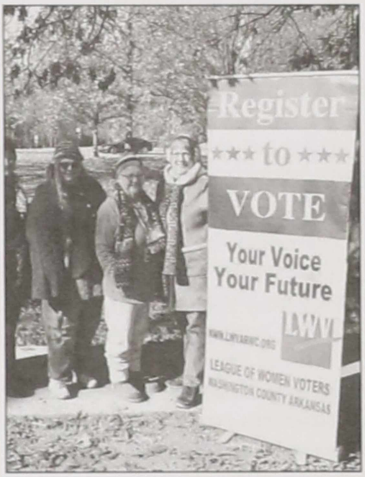


*On the cover:*
Photos left to right, top to bottom:
Modern Literature Club, 1977 (Courtesy Modern Literature Club);
League of Women Voters, undated photo (Courtesy League of Women Voters, Washington County);
The Idle Hour Club, early 1900s (Courtesy University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, McIlroy Family Papers, MC790, Box 5, Folder 12);
Home Demonstration state meeting, undated photo (Courtesy University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Dorris Vick Collection MC961)

# Women's Early Civic and Study Clubs in Fayetteville

## *Groups organized around varied interests*

*Winner of the 2023 WCHS writing competition Lessie Stringfellow Read Prize*

*By Andrea Cantrell*

In the 1980s, the Special Collections department of the University of Arkansas Libraries expanded efforts to preserve and collect records of women's clubs and to document the many contributions that members of women's clubs have made to improving our quality of life—from better homes to better communities, and from outreach and charitable works to opportunities for personal and professional development. Archivists Ethel C. Simpson and Ellen Compton (Shipley) spoke at many club meetings about the importance of preserving club records and described how they are preserved. Now many collections of records for study clubs, civic improvement and political action groups, home demonstration clubs, and more are available for use in Special Collections. As a result, students and historians have access to many resources for researching community, family, and county history. These collections are used for class assignments and scholarly publications.

Sadly, records of many other clubs are not preserved in a library or museum. If extant, they are still with the club, with former club officers, or with family members who have inherited them. This article concentrates on the records preserved in Special Collections because it currently houses more holdings of Fayetteville women's clubs' records than elsewhere. Women's groups in early churches as well as those created as auxiliaries

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*Andrea Cantrell is retired Head of Research Services, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections. She researches manuscript collections pertaining to women's clubs. Her article "Cy Sutherland: Architect, Educator, Preservationist" was published in the Spring 2023* Flashback.

by men's fraternal organizations and patriotic societies are not included in this article because they were usually established by male-governed entities to support the men's agendas and to promulgate their beliefs to the children.

Early women's clubs are often referred to as literary, cultural, or study clubs. They were usually started for self-education about such topics as history, art, music, and literature. Social problems, contemporary authors, philosophy, and current political issues were soon added to studying the classics.[1] In recent years, historians have begun to analyze the benefits and impact of women's clubs. For example, a book by Theodora Penny Martin[2] compared the educational aspects of the clubs' programs with the more structured education offered by colleges. Revealing her bias as a professor of education at Michigan State University, she ignored the work of clubs' social benefits to women and their communities, especially their philanthropic projects and the opportunities clubs provided women for greater community involvement. Other studies have pointed out that through participation in women's clubs, members have gained self-confidence, a better understanding of the mechanics of political expression, public speaking experience, networking skills, and more.[3]

Segment of mural showing Lessie Stringfellow Read (in white dress) and Stephen Chism, author of a book about Read. Photo courtesy of Andrea Cantrell.

Mission statements for most clubs also emphasize service and working together with other women and with other organizations. One Fayetteville club woman who exemplified this philosophy was Lessie Stringfellow Read (Mrs. James J. Read).[4] Her extensive participation in clubs in Fayetteville and Washington County are documented in several of these collections.[5]

Best known to many as the editor of the *Fayetteville Democrat* from 1918 to 1945, Read was also a correspondent for several national newspapers and wrote for national magazines including the *Saturday Evening Post*.

At various times, she was state chair of publicity for the Arkansas Federation of Women's Clubs (AFWC); editor for the General Federation Magazine of the national General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), and publicity chair for the GFWC. In these roles, she made significant connections with many club women across the state because GFWC was an "umbrella" organization for different types of women's clubs.[6]

The AFWC held its 1915 annual state convention on the University of Arkansas campus. The conference program lists AFWC bylaws,

rules for delegates, names of committee chairs, schedule of committee reports, and program titles. Read was listed as press chair for the event.[7] The four-day meeting offered presentations on a wide variety of topics, for example, "Club Women and Home Economics Extension Work," "Rural Advancement Clubs," "Industrial Education of Rural Negroes in Arkansas," etc.[8] Members were so impressed with the UofA's facilities, faculty, and speakers that a long resolution passed unanimously at their next meeting which indicated that the university had provided them "a series of lectures and talks that would make star attractions on the programs of any Chautauqua in the land."[9] High praise indeed because in 1915 the Chautauqua Movement was at its peak. Chautauqua meetings were well-attended and "introduced people to issues of public concern."[10] The resolution went on to state that delegates of the AFWC "returned to their communities believing that if speakers are needed on questions of the day, the University is the place to get them."[11]

Read organized the Good Government League, which was a citizens' reform group working to correct electoral abuses and political corruption in Fayetteville, 1933 to 1936. Their efforts were successful, and the corrupt officials were defeated at the next election.[12]

Read was also a co-founding member and served as chairman at the first meeting of the Washington County Historical Society held February 18, 1951, as reported in the first issue of the Washington County Historical Society (WCHS) quarterly journal *Flashback*.[13] [Back issues of *Flashback* can be purchased through the WCHS Bookstore.[14]] Though not a women's club exclusively, women have had major roles in the Washington County Historical Society from the beginning. The large collection of the society's papers includes many materials about Fayetteville and Washington County women's clubs, especially the boxes containing Read's materials, cited earlier.

As an important leader in early Fayetteville history, "Miss Lessie" was included in a mural painted in 1999 on the eastern base of the Washington County Courthouse parking lot (along the drive from Dickson Street to the back of the building, formerly the Roberta Fulbright Public Library).[15]

Another important Fayetteville clubwoman, Sylvia Geyser Swartz,[16] was active in numerous clubs including the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and the League of Women Voters (LWV).[17] In 2002, Swartz established a charitable trust that pays income to her family members and friends for a period of time before funding an endowed chair in political science in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. According to her obituary, "Her gift is expected to have accumulated more than $1.5 million."[18]

Some women's clubs focus on civic improvement and political action. A very early example of women's clubs in Fayetteville was the Political Equality League for which Special Collections holds four items, includ-

ing resolutions passed at the organizational meeting held May 2, 1914.[19] Their goals were to help win the right for women to vote and to encourage women to be informed and active voters. They became the Fayetteville League of Women Voters in March 1920, five months before passage of the 19th Amendment.[20]

The organization's name changed in 1966 to League of Women Voters of Washington County (WCLWV) when the Springdale league disbanded. A nonpartisan organization, they continue to encourage informed and active participation by women in government through education and advocacy. They have distributed publications and held public meetings about political and community issues such as voting procedures, water quality, land use planning, housing, education, and more. They issued the booklet "Washington County Elected Officials" biennially and the periodical "Washington County Voter" beginning in 1967. The UofA Libraries catalog lists these as well as their studies of local topics. Special Collections houses four manuscript collections of records for this organization for the years 1920 to 2009 and since 2019.[21] Beginning in November 2019, annual captures of the Washington County League of Women Voters' website, Facebook page, and Twitter account will continue to be added to the collections for long-term preservation of the WCLWV website and may be viewed on the collection's Archive-It page online.[22]

The Fayetteville Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) was established in 1923 as a chapter of the Arkansas Division of AAUW at a meeting attended by representatives from Fayetteville, Little Rock, and Hot Springs. Special Collections houses two collections for this organization. The first covers the years 1923 to 1984. It includes correspondence, accounts of meetings, financial records, scrapbooks of clippings, and yearbooks from the Fayetteville Branch and from several other Arkansas cities. Significant correspondents include: J. William Fulbright, John Paul Hammerschmidt, Morriss Henry, John McClellan, and more.[23] The second collection consists of five scrapbooks for the years 1985-1989 which contain records pertaining to the Fayetteville Branch of the AAUW as well as the Southwest Central Region and the National Association.[24]

AAUW has a long record of working on important political, social, and public policy issues. In the 1960s, the AAUW and the League of Women Voters took strong stands on voter registration and local government reform. This action drew criticism from state legislators, especially Paul Van Dalsem [Democrat from Perry County]. When speaking of advocacy groups, during a 1961 debate sponsored by AAUW, he stated "the worst and most uncompromising is your women's groups."[25] His attacks continued, notably in August 1963 when he spoke at the Optimist Club of Little Rock, he stated, "We don't have any of these university women in Perry County, but I'll tell you what we do up there when one of our women starts poking around in something she doesn't know anything about.

We get her an extra milk cow. If that don't work, we give her a little more garden to tend to. And then if that's not enough, we get her pregnant and keep her barefoot."[26] His inflammatory remarks were published in the *Arkansas Gazette* and made headlines across the country.[27]

A collection of records for the Fayetteville Chapter of the National Organization for Women, which later became the Northwest Arkansas Chapter of NOW, contains records from the 1970s to 1990s. The collection also includes some records for the Arkansas Chapter of NOW documenting the establishment of task forces and political action committees to address women's issues.[28]

The Fayetteville Business and Professional Women's Club (B&PW) was formed in 1924. The club has supported the public library, the United Relief Association, the Red Cross, Harmon Playfield, and various city beautification projects. Scrapbooks for the years 1929 to 1946 and 1965 to 1984 were created to document the activities of the club and also include some materials about state, regional, and national B&PW club affairs.[29]

Dr. Mary Burton's collection contains additional materials for the Fayetteville B&PW. These include minutes and her essay "My term as president of the Fayetteville Club" (1983 to 1984). Burton was a professor at the UofA Home Economics Department (now the School of Human Environmental Sciences) for 34 years.[30]

The Northwest Arkansas Branch of the National League of American Pen Women was founded in May 1952 by Poet Laureate of Arkansas Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni. A collection of nine boxes of materials contains records for 1954 to 2007 including issues of *The Pen Woman* magazine 1985-2005.[31]

The Ozark Poets and Writers Collective was initiated by Deborah Robinson and Lisa Bostic in 1994. Members met first at Uncle Gaylord's on Mountain Street for open mic nights and performances.[32] After 2019, because of the Covid 19 pandemic, Noelia Cernua continued meetings via Zoom sessions for monthly poetry readings. Originally a women's club, male members were admitted later.[33] Long-time member Burnetta Hinterthuer currently maintains the archives for the group.[34]

The Iota chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International was organized in 1944 in Fayetteville to encourage professional and personal growth of women educators and promote excellence in education. One collection includes records from 1963 to 1982.[35] A second collection includes incomplete files of yearbooks and membership information from 1948 to 2001 and newsletters from 1959 to 2000.[36]

The Fayetteville chapter of Sigma Alpha Iota was founded November 30, 1925, and the Fayetteville Alumnae Chapter was chartered May 13, 1967. The fraternity is involved in various philanthropic projects that serve to promote music and to improve communities.[37] Alumna Margaret Myers was also a member of Alpha Lambda Delta, performed in several orchestras, and was the music and string teacher in El Dorado public schools 1958 to 1977.[38]

Most local clubs include philanthropic projects, but a few stand out for focusing on raising funds for charities and promoting public awareness of community causes, for example:

* The Women's Civic Club was organized by the Wednesday Club of Fayetteville and other local women's groups with the motto "Charity and Culture." Its primary purpose was to secure an adequate building for the city library. Club members also worked to protect and preserve Fayetteville's historic buildings and to encourage city beautification projects. Two scrapbooks compiled by Gertrude Thomas contain records of activities from the beginning of the club, October 24, 1934, until February 15, 1976.[39]

* The Women's Charity League was established in 1935 to promote community welfare. They provided student sponsorships, helped the Red Cross and Salvation Army drives, and in 1953 organized the Washington Regional Medical Center Auxiliary, a volunteer service organization.[40]

* The Goldenrod Club and the Junior Civic League provided excellent examples of women's clubs working together on their common goal of community improvement. They sponsored an entry for Fayetteville in the Nationwide City Beautification contest in 1960-1962.[41] The Goldenrod Extension Homemakers Club continued work with community improvement projects in 1966 to 1968.[42]

Records for University of Arkansas Clubs

The national women's fraternal society of Chi Omega was founded on the UofA campus in 1895. Professor Ida Pace Purdue, an associate professor of English and Modern Language from 1895 to 1898, was instrumental in founding it. In 1899 she became the first editor of the national organization's official publication, *Eleusis*.[43] Currently, Chi Omega is said to be the largest women's fraternal organization in the world, with "over 400,000 initiates, 181 collegiate chapters, and 248 alumnae chapters."[44] One notable alumna of the UofA's Psi Chapter is Blanche Lambert Lincoln, who held several elective office positions and in 1999 became the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate from Arkansas since Hattie Caraway in 1932. Lincoln was "the youngest woman ever elected to the Senate at age 38."[45]

The Chi Omega Greek Theatre was built at the UofA in 1930 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. It continues to be a focal point on campus for ceremonies, rallies, and other special events.

The Delta Iota Chapter of Delta Delta Delta sorority was established at the UofA in 1913. Prominent alumnae have included Louise McPhetridge Thaden, winner of the Bendix Transcontinental Air Race, 1936; Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni, poet laureate of Arkansas, 1954; and Donna Axum, Miss America, 1964.[46] Throughout her career, Donna Axum Whitworth served on numerous UofA boards and committees. Also, Whitworth gave a substantial donation which led to the creation of the Donna Axum Fitness Center.[47]

The UofA Division of Student Affairs Greek Life webpage lists the following sororities as current members of the Panhellenic Council on campus: Alpha Chi Omega, Alpha Delta Pi, Alpha Omicron Pi, Chi Omega, Delta Delta Delta, Delta Gamma, Kappa Delta, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Phi Mu, Pi Beta Phi, and Zeta Tau Alpha.[48]

Campus Women's Clubs Unaffiliated with Panhellenic

* The Young Women's Christian Association collection includes scrapbooks, 1916 to 1923, and other memorabilia pertaining to the group's activities.[49]

* University Dames was organized as a social club for married women students and the wives of students on November 15, 1945. A scrapbook for 1945 to 1971 contains materials recording activities of the UofA chapter.[50]

* The Organized Independent Women's collection consists of scrapbooks for 1947 to 1957 containing material pertaining to social and academic activities of UofA women students.[51]

* Personal scrapbooks prepared by individual students about their club experiences include: Freida Ann Jones[52]; Alice E. Lincoln[53]; Dorothy McDonald[54]; Glaphyra Wilkerson Stafford[55]; Marnelle Thomsen[56]; and Francis Schedecor.[57]

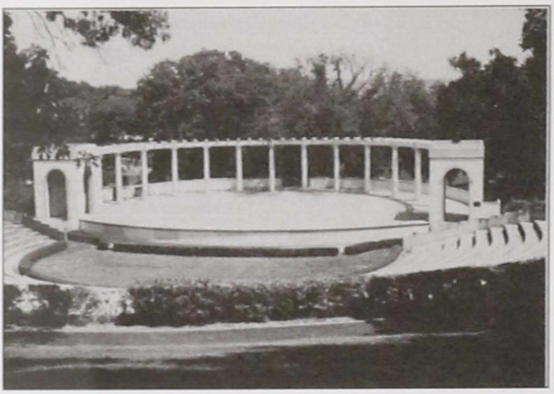
Women's Study Clubs

* The Twentieth Century Club of Fayetteville was founded in 1912 by Mrs. Richard B. Willis, Lessie Stringfellow Read, Mrs. Charles Appleby, and Mrs. Homer Pearson. Yearbooks for 1913 to 1922 list programs about novelists and other writers, philosophers, and artists. As was a custom in other clubs, each member answered roll call with a comment or quotation about the topic specified for each meeting; for example, at a meeting in 1913, members answered with a quotation about the education of women and at that meeting Read gave the program "Modern Education of Women in America."[58] A history of the club published in *Flashback* describes the club's activities, especially their initial and ongoing support of the Fayetteville Public Library.[59] This club began donating its records to Special Collections, UofA Libraries in 2003-04 "which will be processed when more have been received."[60]

* The Wednesday Club was organized in 1912 as the Domestic Science Club of Fayetteville and changed its name to the current one in 1930. The collection consists of records for 1918 to 1979.[61]

* Fayetteville Outlook Club was founded February 27, 1925. Members met twice monthly to discuss topics such as literature and current events. The collection includes records from 1925 to 2004.[62] "Outlook Clubs existed in various U.S. locations during the first half of the 20th century, with activities and membership varying by location."[63]

* The Altrusa Club of Fayetteville, organized in November 1939, is the second oldest Altrusa chapter in Arkansas. Special Collections holds records of the Altrusa Club for 1961 to 1991.[64]



Chi Omega Greek Theatre, built in 1930 on the UofA campus. Photo courtesy of UofA Libraries, Special Collections University of Arkansas Pictures Collection, SC 1144.

One of the most important Altrusa projects was the Fayetteville Youth Dental Program, established as a joint effort of the Altrusa Club of Fayetteville, the Fayetteville School District, and local dentists: Dr. Ernest Stanbury, Dr. Jim Hunt, and Dr. Jacob Agee. Dr. Henry Matthews joined the program in 1987. Matthews said that "a lot of young kids had really bad dental health and were coming to school sick with abscesses."[65] The program began by offering education about dental hygiene, free dental treatments for youth whose families could not afford them, and training for students wishing to become dental assistants. The program "has changed over the years and is now supported with a grant from the Delta Dental of Arkansas Foundation. The program is connected to a Northwest Arkansas Community College dental assisting program for high school students through Northwest Technical Institute and five volunteer dentists. They still partner with the Altrusa Club on special projects."[66]

According to Henry Matthews, currently the president of the advisory board for the program, the Altrusa Club was "the biggest cheerleader and 'on the ground' supporter we ever had. They contributed significant resources over the years to make sure we were able to provide care to the marginalized population of NWA."[67]

* Many women's clubs not organized specifically as book clubs created committees to select books for members to study for self-improvement and cultural development.[68] The committees also usually selected books to donate to the local public library—some titles were from general literature while other club selections related primarily to the club's current projects or overall program.[69] For example, the Modern Literature Club started in 1926 as a book study group within the Fayetteville chapter of the American Association of University Women.

Members of the Modern Literature Club meet monthly to review and critique readings in modern literature. A chapter about the club's history, written by Ellen Compton (Shipley) and Kim Harington, was included in a book by Ellen Slezak.[70] Over the years members have frequently questioned use of the word modern versus contemporary versus recent.[71] According to Harington, "We also prepared a highly selective list

Friday Nut Club members in a 1943 photo. Seated, from left, Martha Davis, Louise Whitfield, Isabelle Collier.
Kneeling, Vera Wade, Gwen Pyeatt, Mary Kincaid, and Gladys Sonneman.
Standing, H. V. Young, Amanda Hilton, Mary Lucille Yoe [for whom Lake Lucille is named], Louise Fowler, Kathryn Woodruff, and Lester Lewis.
Photo courtesy of Hugh Kincaid.

of books that Modern Book Club members had read over the years which is included in Slezak's book."[72]

Modern Literature Club Records collection in Special Collections consist of two series[73]: administrative records (1926 to 2018), and records of club activities (1930 to 1988). The administrative records include club histories written by Eloise Baerg. The second series holds records of club activities, reading lists, book reviews, and taped oral histories of club members conducted in 1987. Each interviewee was asked about her own life and interests, Fayetteville, the University of Arkansas, modern literature, and the history of the Modern Literature Club.

Harington created an album of portraits of Modern Literature Club members in 1992. It contains 33 photographs with a passage or quotation from the member's favorite book.[74] Harriet Jansma selected an excerpt from St. Augustine in which he said that with friends, "We could join in the pleasures that books can give...." Harington felt that Jansma's choice of that quotation was "the most meaningful of all to say something about the importance of reading and a book club...that there is more to a book club than simply reviewing a book and talking about it."[75]

* Another book club, Books and Brunch, was formed by Lynn Burnett in the late 1980s. For the most part, members have included school teachers and retired school teachers. In addition to discussing books, members share "social interaction by having brunch in each other's homes."[76]

The relationship between women's clubs and public libraries is long-standing. Marilyn Martin has described 38 public libraries in Arkansas that were established primarily by the efforts of a single women's club from 1885 to 1935.[77] Her publications do not include the Fayetteville Library, established in June of 1916, because it was created by efforts of several different clubs. In the early years it operated solely on public contributions, a significant amount of which came from proceeds of fundraisers by several women's clubs, including The Twentieth Century Club, Marion Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Women's Civic Club, and the Fayetteville B&PW Club. Members lobbied

actively for expanded facilities and public support of library operations. This continued until 1959 when the Fayetteville City Council voted to take over responsibility for the library by obtaining public funding to build a new library building.[78] During those 43 years, women's clubs held fundraisers for the library's benefit. provided volunteer staffing, and donated books and supplies.

Hugh Kincaid has shared a photo taken in 1943 of members of the Friday Nut Club to which his mother belonged. Members met to play bridge as well as hold holiday parties and other special events. I have heard of similar women's groups but have found no preserved records. Sometimes bridge was just one of several club activities in other clubs.

Several sources have mentioned a social club for Black women in Fayetteville called the Modern Priscillas and that most of its members belonged to the St. James United Methodist and Baptist churches.[79] The club was organized in the early 1930s by Mrs. Ruth Joiner Carr and friends who lived in Fayetteville's Tin Cup community in the Walker Park area. Club members met on Friday evenings in members' homes "to talk, sew, and get away from husbands and dishes."[80] They would have a subject or project planned for each meeting and members gained mutual support, shared community news, discussed needed community improvements, and had fun together while piecing together lovely quilts. The club was active through the 1950s.

A mural completed in 2012 shows 33 community images painted on the outer walls of the Walker Park's handball court. Photographs of each of the three walls can be seen in an article by Todd Gill in the *Fayetteville Flyer*.[81] Carr is shown in the 20th position on the north wall of the mural. Near her in the 17th position on the mural is Jesse Bryant who was a very powerful influence in the community surrounding Walker Park. She has been active in the St. James Methodist Church where she initiated a Free Health Clinic. Bryant "takes pride in knowing her family is in possession of the 'Modern Priscilla quilt,' depicted on the mural."[82] A photograph of it can be seen in *Stitches in Time: A Legacy of Ozark Quilts*.[83]

The national Modern Priscilla Club was founded in 1926 by Mamie Garvin Fields, Lem(y) Lewis and Viola Ford Turner.[84] A fashion, needlework, and decorative arts magazine, *The Modern Priscilla*, was published from 1887 to 1930. It provided ideas and patterns for projects made by local clubs. Copies of the magazine are available for sale online.[85]

### Extension Clubs

The Russell Gayer Collection of Arkansas Home Demonstration Club Records[86] consists of six boxes of materials ranging from 1937 to 2014, particularly those related to Washington County home demonstration clubs. For Fayetteville clubs, it includes 20 files for the Busy Bees Extension Homemakers Club and yearbooks of the Growing 59ers Extension Homemakers Club, 1979 to 1996.

Special Collections also has 11 additional collections for women's

home demonstration/extension clubs in Washington County which are described in the Winter 2021 *Flashback* article, "Working Together and Helping Others: Washington County Women's Extension Clubs."[87]

Garden Clubs

* The Fayetteville Perennial Garden Club was organized on June 18, 1930. In addition to monthly meetings from September through May, the club held a Christmas Social and a tour of houses decorated for Christmas. Two of their ongoing projects was beautification of Arkansas Avenue and the Veterans Administration Hospital grounds.[88]

* The Fayetteville Garden Club, established in 1932, is a women's club dedicated to city beautification. Projects have included park cleanups and planting flowers in public places. Two collections contain minutes, yearbooks, and scrapbooks for 1955 to 2009.[89]

* The Demeter Garden Club was formed in 1951 as a social horticultural group. The group sponsored "flower show schools" and hosted flower shows that drew visitors from other states. The Demeter Garden Club changed its name to Home and Garden Club in 1983, continuing the original aim to "stimulate an interest in cooperative gardening" and to make the grounds of the community more beautiful.[90]

* The Colonial Garden Club was founded in January 1960. For 30 years, the Colonial Garden Club planted trees and shrubs in the median of Arkansas Avenue, established and maintained garden projects at the Fayetteville City Hospital, and engaged in efforts to clean historical sites and cemeteries.[91]

Today women's clubs remain very active, some using zoom sessions for meetings as well as telephone and email chains, text messaging, blogs, Facebook, and PowerPoint programs to work together on their projects. For example, Martha Brown, president of Life Skills Extension Homemakers Club (EHC) reports that, "We are eager to learn and use new technologies as they become available to help us work together on our projects and coordinate our volunteer service as well as reaching out to involve new members."[92] This enables women with young children at home, women with mobility issues, and those caring for someone in the home to participate in the work of a club and enjoy its social benefits.

Women's clubs continue to offer opportunities for service to the community as well as the rewards of friendship and mutual support. For example, the Washington County Extension Homemakers Newsletter for October 2023 reports that there are 17 EHC clubs in Washington County. The newsletter includes two and one-half pages describing activities and projects completed by individual clubs.

*Author's Note: First, I would like to express my appreciation for the efforts of Michael J. Dabrishus, Ethel C. Simpson, and the late Ellen Compton in obtaining and arranging for the preservation of the numerous women's club records in Special Collections at the University of Arkansas Libraries. Also to the generations of women who organized to help improve*

*our daily lives and the club secretaries and club historians who created the preserved collections. Several librarians have provided me invaluable assistance in helping me gain access to key sources cited above: Robin Roggio and her team in the Interlibrary Loan Department, University of Arkansas Libraries; Casiday Long and Kara Flynn in Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries; and appreciation to Kim Harington for her comments about Jasma's favorite quotation.*

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Endnotes

[1] J. C. Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement in America* (New York: Published under the authority of the Council of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs of America by H.G. Allen & Co., 1898), pp. 210-231.
[2] Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).
[3] Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991); and Andrea Cantrell, "Working Together and Helping Others: Washington County Women's Extension Clubs," *Flashback* 71, No. 4 (Winter 202) p. 160.
[4] For an overview of Lessie Stringfellow Read's career and her numerous leadership roles, see Joshua Cobbs Youngblood, "'Miss Lessie' Was There: Fayetteville's Renowned Organizer and Newspaperwoman, Lessie Stringfellow Read," *Flashback* 70 (Fall 2020), pp. 98-109.
[5] Lessie Stringfellow Read, Arkansas Federation of Women's Clubs Records, MS R22 233B, Special Collections, UofA Libraries Collection: Lessie Stringfellow Read, Arkansas Federation of Women's Clubs Records | ArchivesSpace at the UofA (atlas-sys.com); Good Government League Records (MS G591 233B), Special Collections, UofA Libraries Collection: Good Government League Records | ArchivesSpace at the UofA (atlas-sys.com); Lessie Stringfellow Read Literary Manuscripts (MS R22L 351A), Special Collections, UofA Libraries Collection: Lessie Stringfellow Read Literary Manuscripts | ArchivesSpace at the UofA (atlas-sys.com) ; Washington County Historical Society Collection (MC 1368), boxes 3, 11, 14, 90-92, and more) Special Collections, UofA Libraries Collection: Washington County Historical Society Collection | ArchivesSpace at the UofA (atlas-sys.com).
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# Part I: The Story of Fayetteville's Black Diamond Orchestra

*Excerpted from* The Music Men of Turn-of-the-Century Fayetteville, *by Denele Campbell, 2022.*

*By Denele Campbell*

The Black Diamond Orchestra first appeared in Fayetteville's entertainment venues in 1903. They would continue to enjoy bookings in a wide variety of programs for the next 30 years, one of the longest running local talents in the town's history. Even more remarkable, this entity rose from the depths of the "Holler," otherwise known as Tin Cup, where the majority of Fayetteville's Black population lived.

Initially, the repertoire of the Black Diamond Orchestra featured so-called "plantation" music typically performed by string bands—fiddle, five-string banjo, acoustic guitar, mandolin, upright bass, and/or lap dulcimer, depending on the group's members and the instruments in their possession. Eventually giving birth to jazz in the early 20th century, plantation music involved work songs (rhythmic, reflecting the cutting, rowing, chopping, hammering of the worker) as well as dance songs.

> The music always had a strong ground beat, the rhythm of work, full of field hollers, forerunners of "the break," and insistent call and response patterns, blue notes, falsetto voices with melisma.... The plantation songs soon became drenched with the rhythms of the Southern churches, both offsprings of African drumming and went straight into Folk Blues and Country Music and Jazz.... [1]

These weren't the only influences that led to the development of jazz.

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*Denele Campbell writes frequently on the history of Washington County. This article is taken from her book,* The Music Men of Turn-of-the-Century Fayetteville. *Her latest release,* The Wild Men of West Fork, *is available at Amazon.com.*

"Old Plantation Play-Song," from *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings: The Folk-Lore of the Old Plantation*, by Joel Chandler Harris, p. 164a. Illustrations by Frederick S. Church and James H. Moser. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881.

Minstrelsy, ragtime, and vaudeville also played a part. But we'll get to that shortly.

Some sources state that the Black Diamond Orchestra formed in the late 19th century, and it probably did. There is reason to believe that music makers within these same families and neighborhood had been performing long before notice by the white community, at least within their own circles and probably since the end of the Civil War. Nuances of voice and treasured instruments would have been passed down through families. But, not surprisingly, nothing of the Black Diamond Orchestra has been found in newspaper records of those decades.

Audiences of the late 1800s expected waltzes, reels, and other sedate dance music of the times, and most early references to the orchestra's music name these styles. Before that, a few mentions of entertainment by Black members of the Fayetteville community include the following:

November 18, 1871, in a rare instance of public acknowledgement of the Black community, the newspaper reported that,

> …the town was enlivened on Saturday morning last by the sweet strains of music. The California Cornet Band, upon the lawn of the Court House, and just down the street upon Barney's veranda, the Fayetteville Cornet Band, playing beautiful pieces of music, alternately over and anon from Happy Hollow wafted upon the breezes, harmonic sounds from the colored Brass Band. For a while new life was given to the town and everything 'moved lovely.'[2]

Dec 21, 1882

> Dick Douglass, Steve Stone, Nelson Thompson, and Jeff Cooper, colored citizens of our town, have organized a string band and are prepared to furnish music for balls and dances. They play well.

May 15, 1891

> … [illegible] the Tin Cup Coons parade …[illegible] Minstrels Friday

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Circa 1890, Ragtime broke into the public consciousness.

This new music was a syncopated synthesis of a variety of earlier
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The slightly damaged photo shows that musical instruments and musicians were part of the Black community. The African-American Masonic Lodge band is shown on the north side of the Fayetteville Square, ca. 1890. Courtesy Shiloh Museum of Ozark History / Peter Harkins Collection (S-90-194-152).

genres such as marches, popular dance songs, music from the Black south, and music from the Caribbean. Despite this disparate collection of components, ragtime developed a coherent sound through the explicit use of a strongly syncopated beat. This pronounced, ragged beat gave ragtime its name as well as its attendant controversy. The rhythmic drive of the music—present in each of ragtime's various forms—spurred a national conversation about the alleged immoral nature of the music. A number of commentators argued that the music eroded the Victorian values of the nation, while others attacked it for being too raw, too untamed, too Black. African-American musicians played such a large role in the creation and diffusion of ragtime, that many white critics faulted the music for not being "American" enough.[3]

Vaudeville theaters helped develop an audience for ragtime as well as provide for a repertoire. But vaudeville also brought with it certain elements from blackface minstrelsy.[4] Ragtime emerged from this complicated context of blackface caricature, racist comedic tropes, and a burgeoning entertainment market. African Americans negotiated this challenging landscape through a combination of playing to and fighting against expectations from audiences as well as businessmen.

The first Black Diamond Orchestra event mentioned in the Fayetteville newspaper was announced for Wednesday, September 9, 1903, to be held at Monte Ne, where dancing would be offered "all night in the large auditorium, with music by one of the finest of orchestras. At the same time continuing throughout the night there will be boating on the lake and lagoon. The noted Black Diamond orchestra will play and sing all night on the waters."[5] Coin Harvey, the ambitious and eccentric creator

of Monte Ne, scheduled a special excursion train to bring guests to his event on a five-mile track from Lowell that Harvey had caused to be built. Guests were transported from the railroad terminus to the actual Monte Ne inn in a gondola.

If Coin Harvey engaged the group to perform at Monte Ne in 1903, it can be assumed they previously had become a popular known entity. It can probably also be assumed that ragtime was a featured part of the group's repertoire.

Engagements for the orchestra over the next several years included private parties and receptions as well as bookings by the Shamrock Club, White Chapel Club, and other civic and university entities. By 1911, the group had become a featured event at gatherings such as a Kappa Sigma fraternity dance and a celebration at Fern Dells, "the handsome country home of Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Stuckey on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of their marriage." More than 300 guests were "allowed perfect liberty of choice in the viands [and] left likewise free to choose the place he was to sit and partake of them while listening to the strains of the Black Diamond Orchestra. . . . After the last guests had been served the orchestra was removed from the basement to the stair landing of the big hall where music was furnished throughout the evening and dancing was indulged in by the young and old…"[6]

January 8, 1912: Woodmen of the World installations ceremonies and banquet … "Black Diamond Orchestra played several popular and pretty selections…"

January 24, 1912: "Black Diamond Orchestra returned from Rogers this morning where they had been to play for a big dance there last night."

February 19, 1912: Kappa Sigma house dinner and dance… "Black Diamond Orchestra played the program of two steps and waltzes…"

February 21, 1912: President George Washington birthday reception "…In the hallway, the Black Diamond Orchestra was stationed on a stair landing and their merry tunes suggested the older days when the darkies played plantation airs and the minuet by which 'ole master and the missus' tipped the light fantastic toe."

April 17, 1912: Ozark Club dance with Black Diamond Orchestra.

January 13, 1913: 'Get Together' banquet at the Washington Hotel. "The Black Diamond Orchestra kept playing and we kept eating…"

May 24, 1913: Boy Scouts banquet Black Diamond Orchestra "…the Virginia Reel was danced under the stars."

June 21, 1913: UA Summer school dance at Carnall Hall with Black Diamond Orchestra.

November 17, 1913: Tri Delta reception "...a bank of ferns on the first stair landing escanned the Black Diamond Orchestra which rendered a popular program through the at-home hours..."

1913: "For the annual university picnic, 444 students boarded a Frisco train for the two-hour ride to Monte Ne resort, where they rode the Venetian gondolas and 'tripped the light fantastic' to the Black Diamond Orchestra."[7]

August 1916: City Park "Black Diamond String Orchestra will dispense music before the concert proper begins." Also another ad about this "string band."

August 1916: Program at Trent's Park to honor summer visitors, cosponsored by Business Men's Club. "Music was furnished during supper by the Black Diamond Orchestra."

February 26, 1917: Ozark Club dance party with Black Diamond Orchestra.

March 26, 1917: Alpha Zeta "New York" party "...the drowsy strumming of the Black Diamond Orchestra brought Dixie to New York."

March 20, 1920: "Special Six o'clock dinner Sunday at Nickens Brothers Café. Music by Black Diamond Orchestra..."

In September 1924, the UofA's new radio station KFMQ featured the Black Diamonds asking listeners to send postcards if they heard the broadcast. "Weeks later, the *Fayetteville Democrat* reported that the station received postcards from listeners as far away as Canada, New Mexico, and Washington D.C."[8]

The first mention of named individuals in the group appeared in the Fayetteville newspaper in November 1924 regarding a benefit for the Colored Methodist Conference.

Black Diamond Orchestra selections, Zolean Hays [Hayes] leader [age 16].

Vocal Solo—Thaddeus Young [age 19] accompanied by Zolean Hays.

The program included a children's chorus and a sextet singing "Ain't Gwine Study War No More" with Clara Hays [Hayes], Viola Hall, Melba Carr, Nellie Evins, Jake Carr, and Thaddeus Young.

Another program that year whose profits would be evenly divided between City Hospital and the "colored Methodist Church building fund" included the Black Diamond Orchestra directed by Odie Wright and, for this event, included Sammy Young, E. Young [Embus], and Osburn Cox.

"Sammy," handling the string bass, was Sam Young Jr. Osburn Cox, the fiddle player of the group, was born in 1871 to Dick and Madeline (Smith) Cox of Fayetteville. Odie Wright, born around 1897, played the banjo. The group's leadership shifted between Wright and Embus Young.

A benefit held the following March 1925 received a significant write-up in the *Fayetteville Daily Democrat*.

> Native negro music by voices trained and untrained in a program of spirituals and folk-song, modern and ancient, attracted a white audience completely filling the colored Methodist church Wednesday evening.
>
> A total of $96 was collected, $10 of this going to the Modern Priscilla Club in their sale of refreshments, and the remainder being door receipts which are to be divided equally between the City Hospital and the colored Methodist Church building fund.
>
> The event was made something of a hospitality on the part of several prominent people, line parties having been given by Major W. A. Smith, University commandant; Col. C. F. Armistead, Owen Mitchell, and others especially interested in the benefit projects… [Performers included] Jubilee Singers, led by Clara Hays, the Black Diamond Orchestra direct by Odie Wright, and with Sammy Young, E. Young and Osburn Cox playing; the trio led by Beulah Robinson and "Little Black Me" sung by Melva [Melba] Young together with the songs of 25 children greatly delighted the audience while other numbers received their fair share of applause…[9]

Samuel Young Sr., from https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/199605509/samuel-young

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These musicians were members and descendants of some of Fayetteville's oldest Black families. The Youngs were the family of Sam Young (1828-1931) and his wife Martha (Reed) (1834-1935). Mr. Young, born into slavery in Missouri, arrived in Fayetteville by 1866. From his cemetery records:

> Mr. Young was a former slave who resided in Arkansas for over 74 years. Sam reported that he had been sold at least sixteen times during his life as a slave. He recalled the highest price he was bought for was $1600. Sam's last owner was a Mr. Billy Moore of Paris, Texas. Mr. Young followed his former master from Texas to Fayetteville and eventually settled in Fayetteville for the rest of his life. Sam married Martha, also a former slave. They lived to both be over 100 years old. Both died during the 1930s in Fayetteville. He is known to have built a home along Mountain Street, which was destroyed by a tornado in 1880. Sam Young was buried in Oaks Cemetery, but a gravestone does not exist. His son, Sam Young Jr. is also buried in Oaks Cemetery with a gravestone.

Their six children were Sam Young Jr. (1864-1950) (married Lula Williams), Palis Young (1877-), William Embus Young (1879-1953), Bertha L. Young (1880), Rosa Young (1882) (married Fred Carr), Ether
~~~

Young (1886-1969) (married Bernie Morgan), and Russell Young (1895-1922) (married Edith Stephens).[10] Old Sam's musical descendants included Thaddeus (by Rosa), Melba (by Sam Jr.'s son Russell), and Sherman Morgan (by Ether) which, along with the musical leadership of his sons Sam Jr. and Embus, leads to the conviction that old "Uncle Sam" Young possessed not-insignificant musical talents of his own and passed down techniques and instruments to his heirs.

Also prominent among Black community musicians was Clara Hayes and her extended family. Born in 1888 to Joe Manuel (1854-1938) and his wife Susan (Marshbanks) (1862-1938), Clara became the wife of Leonard Hayes around 1900. Their children were Katherine Hayes (1902-), Zolean/Zoline Hayes (1908-), Christine J. Hayes (1911-2001) (married Joseph Thompson), Gussie Hayes (1913-), Ralph L. "Buddy" Hayes (1916-1973), and Mary E. Hayes (1919-). Likely well-known to more modern music historians was Clara's son Ralph L. "Buddy" Hayes and her grandsons through Christine, 'Pint,' later known as Jo Jo Thompson (Joseph Bob), and 'Half Pint' Thompson (Clifford L.) who made names for themselves with childhood song and dance performances.

Clara's mother Susan Manuel was one of three Black entities offering hospitality during a time when Blacks were denied access to cafes, hotels, and other white-owned businesses. At least one of these locations served as an early dance venue for the Black community.

> Only 16 towns in Arkansas were listed as having amenities for African American travelers. In Washington County, Fayetteville was the only city listed. The 1949 Green Book listed hotel service being provided by Mebbs at 9 North Willow Avenue, and that two homes provided lodging for travelers, Mrs. S. Manuel at 313 North Olive Street and N. Smith at 259 East Center Street.
>
> The hotel listed as "Mebbs" was very likely a cafe called Webb's, run by Emma Webb in the early 1920s and later by her husband, James W. Webb, the pastor of St. James Baptist Church. Local phone directories listed Webb's restaurant at 14 N. Willow, 17 N. Willow and 101 N. Willow, suggesting that the Green Book listing might not be correct by the current addressing on Willow. Mrs. S. Manuel is undoubtedly Susan Marshbanks Manuel, widow of Joseph Manuel and a matriarch of the Manuel and Hayes families.[11]

"Naomi Smith's house on Center Street was similarly a residence with rooms for rent upstairs and a café for the community. It sold barbeque, sandwiches, candy, and ice cream. 'It was like a little juke joint and you'd go in there and dance,' said Virginia Denton, who was born in 1949 and was Smith's niece. 'People went there for recreation. It had booths.'"[12]

Like most of Black history, records on family history are vanishingly sparse. Hidden behind the dark veil of enslavement, ancestors' origins and any particular musical skills are generally not a matter of record.

In 1925, two news items elaborated on the background of the orches-

Part of a larger poster for Al G. Field's Minstrels: "A night in Paris during the 1900 Exposition: the gorgeous scenic spectacle." Embus Young was 21 years old in 1900 and could possibly be among the men portrayed here. Courier Company, Litho. Dept., Buffalo, NY, 1900.

tra's primary leader, Embus Young.[13]

Embris [sic] Young leads program, former minstrel with a well-known minstrel organization and will give a number of minstrel stunts, including some buck and wing dances. Jazz music and dancing, not permissible at a church, will feature the program which is to be entirely different from the recent colored musical program given at the Methodist Church.

Colored programs are becoming quite the thing in Fayetteville, with an aroused interest in negro music and African folk-lore. On Friday night a colored troop of entertainers including a local celebrity, E. Young, formerly end-man with Field's Minstrels when that company had colored end-men, will give an entertainment at Peabody Hall, University of Arkansas, as joint colored church and white school benefit. The Leverett school PTA is sponsoring the event, featuring Black Diamond Orchestra.

"Just Behold What a Rumbling in the Grave-Yard" is [the] name of one song of real negro spiritual quality to be sung. "All Birds Look Like Chickens to Me," is a song in lighter vein. "My Castle on the River Isle" is a third song expected to bring down the house. There will be colored children and negro women's voices in addition the orchestra specialties and buck-wing dances.

Al G. Field's Minstrels, proving ground for Embus, appeared in Fayetteville's Ozark Theater on more than one occasion, notably in March 1923 when reviews raved over their "usual high-class performance … Costumes, scenery and music were of the best and the work of the performers has not been excelled here by any minstrel company. . . ."[14]

At their invention early in the 1830s, minstrel shows were white male actors in blackface following a three-part format. Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist and social reformer who escaped slavery in Maryland, described blackface performers as ". . . the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens."[15]

In part one the performers were arranged in a semicircle, with

> the interlocutor in the centre and the end men—Mr. Tambo, who played the tambourine, and Mr. Bones, who rattled the bones (a pair of clappers, named after the original material from which they were made)—at the ends. The interlocutor, in whiteface, usually wore formal attire; the others, in blackface, wore gaudy swallow-tailed coats and striped trousers. The program opened with a chorus, often as a grand entrance, and at the conclusion of the song the interlocutor gave the command, "Gentlemen, be seated." Then followed a series of jokes between the interlocutor and end men, interspersed with ballads, comic songs, and instrumental numbers, chiefly on the banjo and violin. The second part, or olio (mixture or medley), consisted of a series of individual acts that concluded with a hoedown or walk-around in which every member did a specialty number while the others sang and clapped.... a third part consist[ed] of a farce, burlesque, or comic opera....[16]

The first minstrel show to feature African-American performers had been assembled as Brooker and Clayton's Georgia Minstrels in 1865. Billed as "The Only Simon Pure Negro Troupe in the World," the group paved the way for other Black minstrel groups which increasingly gained favor across the nation. The Georgia Minstrels toured Fayetteville in September 1888, with a following news report that "The house was crowded, almost every seat being occupied before the curtain rose. The private boxes, for white and colored persons, were well filled, and as a whole the opening was a brilliant success. The entertainment given by the Minstrels is as good and in several particulars excels those given by some white minstrels in the past...."[17] The group performed in Fayetteville again in 1895. There is no record of when or how Embus Young gained access to performer status in Field's show.

However long Embus Young participated in Field's minstrelsy is also not known, but he returned to Fayetteville to share what he'd learned. Jazz had entered the mainstream by 1920, flowing into homes on radio sets and Victrolas with its syncopated rhythms and "talking" music. While local Black musicians may have already evolved their own style of jazz-type music, they were surely influenced by minstrels, ragtime, blues, and jazz being performed elsewhere as well as what Embus had learned.

Music, perhaps more than any other art form, is a fluid medium gaining new ideas and nuances from one day to the next. Even within the same group, rendering of a particular song or piece of music changes a bit each time it is performed. Along with the changing expression of minstrel (and soon vaudeville) musical and performance styles came the growing awareness that quality entertainment could be accomplished by Blacks as well (or better) than whites in blackface.

In an 1890 review of McCabe & Young's minstrel performance in Montgomery, Alabama, in anticipation of the same show's scheduled visit to Fayetteville, the editor remarked that:

> It is refreshing to see a negro minstrel show, composed of real negroes and real minstrels. McCabe & Young's troupe gave a performance last night that filled the bill completely. They were not imitation darkies, and their fun not strained. Neither, strange as it may seem, were they poor musicians or bungling performers. The show was a clever one from beginning to end—no chestnuts, no humbug, but bright and crisp, and enjoyable throughout. At the risk of shocking the conservatives of Montgomery, we make bold to say that McCabe & Young's minstrels are, in everything that goes to constitute negro minstrels, as far above Geo. Wilson's minstrels as the moon above our woodshed.

Despite talented Black performers now appearing in minstrels, shows featuring whites in blackface remained wildly popular. Fayetteville's businessmen and society often attended blackface events where the audiences laughed and applauded stereotyped Black performances carried out by their fellow burnt-cork brethren.[18]

*Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, April 15, 1918:

> Fayetteville Council No. 161 United Commercial Travelers (UCT) will repeat their colored troubadour performance this year on a 'bigger, grander scale than ever'.... Part of proceeds will be reserved for the council's patriotic purposes fund. William Dunn, who makes things right with the press for the travelers says that about 32 travelers will be in the cast and that all the take-offs will be localized. Forty black-faced knights of the group will march in the parade on the day of the performance. Barr's Band will head the column. Owen Mitchell's orchestra will furnish the music for the minstrel.
>
> Everything will be new, including the costumes.... Rehearsals will begin soon under the direction of Mr. O'Laughlin, a former minstrel man. A quartette from the University Glee Club will assist the travelers.

April 2, 1921: A review of 6th UCT minstrel included "... No minstrel is complete without a buck and wing dance and this was supplied by Lon Jordan who was recalled twice...." The same article refers to Tovey's role in local minstrelsy and how benefit proceeds would be distributed.

May 6, 1921: A big event on the square with Tovey and other music "and four old-time Arkansas fiddlers and banjo players from Springdale foothills... the south side of the square will be reserved for colored people who will have their own minstrel music and celebration."

January 20, 1921: Royal Theater Wednesday and Thursday, Soul and Body Peacock Special with an all-star cast directed by Frank Beal.... Music played by the Jimbo Jenkins Jazz Band [No further information for this group has been found.]

February 6, 1925: Lasses White's All Star Minstrels [Leroy

Robert "Lasses" White became famous doing minstrel shows during the early part of the 1900s, and wrote one of the first copyrighted 12-bar blues, "Nigger Blues," originally entitled "Negro Blues." It is said no one knows why White changed the title to the more derogatory term.][19]

*Ed. Note: Part II of Denele Campbell's article on "The Black Diamond Orchestra" continues in the Spring 2024 issue of* Flashback, *with a focus on The Jazz Age.*

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Endnotes

[1]John P. Birchall, "Plantation songs." Accessed June 1, 2022, at https://www.themeister.co.uk/dixie/plantation_songs. "Melisma" is a musical style that allows several notes to be sung to one syllable of text.
[2]It is assumed that Happy Hollow here refers to Tin Cup, which would have been audible from the Square. Other uses of that name have been applied to a large Black pre-Civil War settlement near Cane Hill and, later, to an upscale (white) farm cottage property on the east side of Mount Sequoyah.
[3]Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 11-13, 26-29, 40-44.
[4]Edward A. Berlin, *King of Ragtime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 11. See also Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[5]*Fayetteville Democrat*, September 4, 1903, p. 1.
[6]*Fayetteville Democrat*, November 11, 1911, p. 3.
[7]*Arkansas*, Ark. Alumni Association (Winter 2013), p. 58.
[8]Sandra Cox Birchfield's presentation, "In Search of the Black Diamond Orchestra," given to the Washington County Historical Society on February 15, 2017.
[9]*Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, March 12, 1925, p. 1.
[10]Some family histories state that Embus and Sam Jr. were half-brothers and that other of his offspring were by a woman other than his wife. We have no documentation proving this true or false.
[11]"Safe Harbor During Jim Crow Era," https://www.fayettevillehistory.org/race/
[12]David Edmark, "Fayetteville in the Green Book: A Knit Community," *Flashback* Vol. 69, No. 3 (Fall 2019), p. 130. Naomi was believed to be the widow of Emmett Smith who lived at 304 East Center.
[13]Embus is often mentioned as Embris Young.
[14]*Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, March 28, 1923, p. 5.
[15]Willard B Gatewood Jr., "Frederick Douglass and the Building of a 'Wall of Anti-Slavery Fire' 1845–1846. An Essay Review," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 340–44.
[16]https://www.britannica.com/art/minstrel-show.
[17]*Fayetteville Weekly Democrat*, September 14, 1888, p. 3.
[18]Burnt cork was the material most often used to blacken white skin.
[19]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_%22Lasses%22_White.

# Early History of the Fayetteville Public Library[1]

*By J.B. Hogan*

The new Fayetteville Public Library, completed in 2004. Photo courtesy Fayetteville Public Library

Today the newly expanded Fayetteville Public Library is one of the finest libraries for a city of its size—or perhaps any size—in the country. Exceptional as it is now, the library was created in humble circumstances over a century ago.

On March 16, 1916, a meeting was held in Fayetteville's Central Presbyterian Church to discuss establishing a public library. Chief among the advocates for a library were Mrs. Mary Appleby and University of Arkansas librarian Julia Vaulx. Pastor M. L. Gillespie conducted the meeting which resulted in the creation of a Library Association that consisted of 12 citizens acting as an advisory board. One week later, the group met again to create a constitution and select permanent officers. Julia Vaulx was chosen president and Florida Read vice president. [2]

In order to fund the new library, the board initiated a plan to raise

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*J.B. Hogan is a local historian and author who has published more than 300 stories and poems and 11 books. He is a frequent contributor to* Flashback. *His article "Fayetteville and the Influenza Epidemic of 1918" (*Flashback, *Fall 2021) was awarded Best Community History in a County or Local Journal from the Arkansas Historical Association.*

Above, Grace Keith (left) and Irene Gallaway shown most likely around 1937 when the library was moved from the Stirman home to the second floor of the City Administration building.
Below, unidentified woman in the library after it was moved in 1962 into the Fulbright Building on E. Dickson. The library remained in this location until 2004.
Both photographs courtesy of the Fayetteville Public Library.

$1,000. In a door-to-door campaign, they asked families for $1 donations and $5 from "sustaining members." With the help of "Shulertown" (lower Dickson Street) merchants and the Boy Scouts, they collected $840.[3]

With most of the hoped-for money raised, the board turned to finding quarters for the proposed library. W. F. Buck, Washington County School Supervisor, gave up his office area in the Washington County Courthouse on College Avenue, and Fayetteville had its first public library. The library consisted of some tables and chairs and a small children's room. The first book made available to the public was *Westward Ho!* by Charles Kinglsey[4]

On Thursday, June 16, 1916, the Fayetteville Public Library opened for the first time. Two hundred people came, and they were served punch and listened to music on a Victrola—"the latest thing in record players." The following Saturday, a formal opening for children was held and 100 people attended this event.[5]

With the library established and opening festivities out of the way, operating procedures took center stage. Library hours were set at 2-5 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, with additional night-time hours of 7-9 p.m. on Saturdays. Patrons could check out a maximum of two books for two weeks, with one week renewable. There was a 2-cent per day fine for overdue books. During the first year of operation, the library had 1,750 books, all but 500 of those donated by local citizens. At first, all librarians were volunteers with Edna Hester in charge. Florida Read became the first paid librarian, serving until December 1917.[6]

Lila Rollston was hired to replace Florida Read and would be the main librarian for the next 17 years. During the first years of Rollston's tenure, the library continued to struggle economically and otherwise. It was shut

Washington County Historical Society

*announces*

## The 15th Annual Competition for Articles on History of Washington County

The Washington County Historical Society announces the 15th annual competition for two awards for articles about the history of Washington County. Each award carries an honorarium of $250. The two categories of awards are:

* The Walter J. Lemke Prize for best article on Washington County history, with preference given to subjects outside Fayetteville;
* The Lessie Stringfellow Read Prize for best article on Washington County history, with a focus on Fayetteville.

Topics can address any aspect of county history, including archeology, lives of individuals, architecture, arts and crafts, or records of institutions, and can be set in any time period. All historians – both professional and amateur – are invited to submit articles. Winners will be recognized at the society's annual meeting in October.

Deadline for submissions is June 30, 2024.

Judging is based on contributions to the expansion of the county's history; originality of the subject; and use of primary and secondary sources. Articles must be original material, and not previously published.

Submissions must be typed, and preferably include endnotes. Length – not including endnotes – can range from 2,500 words to 5,000 words. The title page should be headed: "WCHS Prize," followed by the manuscript full title, and the author's name, mailing address, telephone number, and email.

Entries become the property of the Washington County Historical Society and will not be returned. All submissions will be considered for publication in the WCHS journal *Flashback*. WCHS reserves the right to award one or no prizes. Back issues of *Flashback* are available at the Fayetteville Public Library.

Submit manuscripts by June 30, 2024, by mail or email:

* By mail: Patsy Watkins, WCHS Prize, Washington County Historical Society, 118 E. Dickson Street, Fayetteville, AR 72701.
* Email: Patsy Watkins at pwatkins@uark.edu

For questions, contact Watkins at pwatkins@uark.edu.

down for just over a month, as was the rest of the town, during the Influenza quarantine of October 1918 and closed again when the town was quarantined for two weeks in February 1920. Although the library began opening for longer hours and had 800 regular patrons by the early 1920s, several campaigns still had to be conducted to keep the library open.[7]

In October 1922, the library board—presided over by Julia Vaulx—determined that $2,000 would have to be raised or the library would have to close. In November, a "Save the Library" campaign began and with the generous help of citizens, the city, churches, and businesses like the iconic Campbell-Bell department store, enough money was raised to keep the library open. [8]

In 1925 they held a fundraiser that included a fashion show and an amateur football game. The game matched the Fayetteville All-Stars against the Rogers Bearcats. The fashion show netted $48.70 and the football game raised $1,218, but expenses "took most" of the revenues.[9]

Through 1926, the library continued to struggle to stay open and things got so bad that in early January 1927, the library closed "due to lack of funds." After ten years of constant struggle, it looked like the Fayetteville Public Library was finished. To make things worse, Judge H. R. Baker determined the county needed the space occupied by the library and asked them to move out. But if anything was true of these early, difficult days, it was that the city's public library had shown itself to be resilient, and its end was not to be.[10]

On January 26, 1927, an emergency meeting of the library board was held in the Palace Theatre on the East Side of the Square. One hundred and fifty people attended the meeting and an individual subscription plan was proposed. More than $700 was pledged and the library opened the very next day, January 27, 1927. Eventually, almost $2,600 was raised, enough to keep the library open for another year and, in fact, from then on.[11]

With citizen help, a new location was secured. The Stirman home on the southwest corner of East Avenue and Meadow Street (today this is a drive-through bank and is directly across East Avenue from the Graduate Hotel) became the library's new home. It would remain in this pleasant location, with a flower garden maintained by Lila Rollston, for the next ten years. To celebrate the library's new home and success, Mayor Allen Wilson declared March 17, 1927, as Fayetteville Public Library Day.[12]

The library would remain in the Stirman home until 1937, but in July 1934, Lila Rollston, who had been librarian since 1917, died after a short illness. She was 76. The paper lauded her, describing her "sterling worth" to the library and community. She lived "a life of service," giving the "very best that was in her" to everyone but especially to "the boys and girls" who came to the library. In a special column for the paper, noted author Charles J. Finger called for the city to have a Lila Rollston Day. Rollston was buried in Evergreen Cemetery. [13]

In 1935, Irene Gallaway was made head librarian, and in 1937 the

library moved to the second floor of the City Administration building.[14] In the years after World War II, the library grew considerably leading yet again to the need for more space. Before the next move and expansion would occur, Gallaway died on April 12, 1957. She was 87 and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery.[15] Two years prior, on May 21, 1955, the library had lost another of its most important long-time figures. Julia Vaulx passed away at age 84 and was also interred in Evergreen Cemetery.[16]

Due to its continuing growth, in 1962 the library moved into the new Fulbright Building on East Dickson Street, where it stayed for the next 42 years. During this time librarian Grace Keith established the library's extensive genealogy section, working on the project even after retirement. Keith died on December 17, 1995. She was 92 and left behind significant contributions to library history. She is buried in Fayetteville's Fairview Memorial Gardens.[17]

In 2004. the library was relocated to its current location at the southwest corner of West Mountain Street and South School Avenue in the new Blair Library building. Recently expanded, the library is now a cutting-edge institution prepared to serve 21st century patrons.

As remarkable as it is today, it is still instructive to remember the library's origins of a century ago when it occupied a small room in the old courthouse and struggled to survive from year to year. From that humble beginning the Fayetteville Public Library has grown into an extraordinary library whose mission to serve the public has never wavered or changed.

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Endnotes

[1]My appreciation to Fayetteville Public Library Reference Librarians Amy Nelson-Lamont, Kelly Haley, and Renee Findahl for their help in preparing this article.
[2]Grace Keith, "Fayetteville Public Library: A History," Fayetteville Public Library unpublished document, date unknown, pp. 2-4.
[3]Keith, pp. 6-8.
[4]Ibid., pp. 9-11.
[5]Ibid., p. 14.
[6]Ibid., pp. 12, 15-16.
[7]Ibid., pp. 22-27.
[8]Ibid., pp. 43-44.
[9]Ibid., pp. 61-62.
[10]Ibid., p. 64-65.
[11]Ibid., pp. 65-67, 69.
[12]Ibid., p. 68.
[13]*Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, July 19, 20, 23, 1934.
[14]*Fayetteville Daily Democrat*, February 22, 1937.
[15]*Northwest Arkansas Times*, August 12, 13, 15, 1957.
[16]*Northwest Arkansas Times*, May 21, 1955.
[17]*Northwest Arkansas Times*, December 20, 1995.

# Women In History Celebrates 25th Year of Honoring Local Women

*By Maylon Rice*

Frustration at seeing civic clubs and other community organizations honoring a continuous string of men with awards for their public service on boards and community service, a couple of like-minded, professional women in early 1999 decided it was time to make a change for Washington County.[1]

Add to their incentive the first local recognition of a fledgling national holiday that began on February 28, 1909, as National Women's Day to honor women for making a change in people's lives. The date was later changed to early March.[2]

The first National Women's Day celebration in the Northwest Arkansas area—and a new celebration to honor five "pioneering" women—was held on March 29, 1999, at the Clarion Inn Hotel and Convention Center,[3] located off Highway 62/Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Drive.

The five groups hosting this first celebration were the Washington County chapter of the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women (AAUW), Business and Professional Women (B&PW), Altrusa International Fayetteville Chapter, and the Washington County Democratic Women.[4]

The annual Women In History celebration completed its 25th year on March 27, 2023, in an event that brought the total of those recognized over two dozen years to 111 individuals.[5]

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*Maylon Rice is a former board member of the Arkansas Historical Association and a former board member and past president of the Washington County Historical Society. He was a reporter and columnist for the* Northwest Arkansas Times *when it was a stand-alone, daily, independent newspaper in Washington County.*

It was a discussion between Berta Seitz, Wanda Stephens, and others that resulted in the idea of an annual celebration of women and their accomplishments in Washington County, according to Seitz, who many credit for encouraging the dialogue behind the first event.

"We said we were getting tired of seeing all these men in area civic clubs honoring just men, when we knew there were certainly women out there who deserved such honors," said Seitz.[6]

Seitz is a community leader who has served as president of the Fayetteville B&PW, public policy officer of the Arkansas AAUW, and vice president of the Northwest Arkansas Senior Democrats. She was honored as the 1988 Fayetteville Woman of the Year by the Fayetteville B&PW, and was a 2007 honoree at the Women's History Month Banquet.[7]

Her other community and political service includes an appointment by Governor Bill Clinton to the Arkansas State Job Training Coordinating Council, and serving on the Tutors for Literacy Council and on the Board of Directors of the Lady Razorbacks.[8]

Along with Seitz as an initial organizer was Wanda Stephens, a former home economics teacher at West Fork, a local activist, and a member of the National Organization for Women (NOW). Stephens was a tireless worker in the communities, the recipient of an International 4-H Youth Exchange (1953-1954) award, the founder of the Infant Development Center at the University of Arkansas (1987) and a Women In History honoree in 2001.[9]

She, Seitz, and others began meeting in 1998. They contacted five or six different organizations about nominating outstanding women from their membership for recognition. The first meeting was a banquet, followed by Seitz as the moderator who introduced the five groups responsible for the evening. Each group introduced its nominee, and all gave an acceptance speech.

The first class came from membership of the Altrusa Club of Fayetteville, the League of Women Voters, the AAUW, the B&PW, local leaders of the National Organization of Women, and the Washington County Democratic Women's Club.

"All those introductions and acceptance speeches made for a long banquet evening, I do remember that," Seitz said. Since then, the format has changed to shorten the length of the meeting, yet list the accomplishments of the honorees and the groups making the nominations.[10] A display table of memorabilia from each inductee was added in later years to exhibit the awards and recognitions many of those honored received.[11]

The initial group honored during the evening in 1999 were Sylvia Swartz, a botanist and political crusader; Dr. Doris Cook, a long-time accounting professor at the University of Arkansas College of Business; Jesse Bryant, a Washington County Justice of the Peace and health care advocate who helped start the Free Health and Dental Clinic; Laleh Amirmoez, a leading architect who teaches at the UofA School of Architecture; and Dr. Elizabeth Woods, honored as the first and only pioneering gynecologist in

the area and by her work at the UofA Health Center to recruit more female physicians and surgeons to Northwest Arkansas.[12]

Swartz at age 99, stole the spotlight that evening with her dry wit and humor telling stories of coming to Fayetteville in 1929, from Cincinnati, Ohio, with a botany degree from the University of Michigan and hoping to teach alongside her husband, Delbert, at the University.[13]

Swartz said that "...before moving to tiny, rural Fayetteville, adding to my disappointment in moving to this rural berg, was being told that "women were not permitted to each the sciences at the University of Arkansas in 1929.

"'So, I had to do something else and I did a lot of other things,' she said. Therefore, she occupied herself the last seven decades in civic, political, social and educational endeavors.

In introducing Swartz, Marian Orton, a former Fayetteville city board member and also mayor of Fayetteville (under the city manager system in the 1970s) drew laughter at how headstrong and insightful Swartz was as the first female city board member in 1966. Swartz served until 1972 on the city board.[14]

"She (Swartz) is the one who went to the old city council and told them that the road that ran by her house at 620 Bells Addition,[15] on an unpaved dirt road on the western edge of the campus, and near the UA's new football stadium under construction in the late 1940s, needed to be called Razorback Road," Orton deadpanned the audience.

"And all the men did it," Orton said to long and loud laughter. Swartz was honored by the Washington County Historical Society as a Distinguished Citizen in 1995.[16]

Others that evening also told of being "the first" in areas of medicine, accounting and architecture.

Elizabeth Woods was honored as the first and only pioneering gynecologist in the area and paid tribute to the late Dr. Ruth Ellis Lesh, a pioneering physician in Fayetteville.[17]

Doris Cook, represented many "firsts" at the UofA and in the career track of being a certified public accountant.[18] "At age 23," Cook said, "I was one woman in a room of about 100 men taking the CPA exam. Today, that is about 50-50 (men and women) taking the test."

Amirmoez, the youngest of the honorees, thanked the group for her selection for its recognition of her and her beloved profession of architecture.[19] "I never really tried to set out to make a mark, but to give back to the community from day one," she said.

Over the years, other groups joined in the program to honor women, such as the Washington County Republican Women, and other area Altrusa Club International groups in Fayetteville, the Altrusa International Club of Springdale, and Altrusa International of Washington County, and Delta Kappa Gamma Society, Iota Chapter, have all submitted names for honorees.[20] Some groups have dropped out of the participation in these

annual meetings, with the main core the five original groups still managing the yearly banquet and recognizing a group of honorees chosen each spring by the Women In History committee membership.

The annual meeting, like most banquet type gatherings in Fayetteville, has shifted from one location (the first several were at the Clarion Inn) to the downtown location of the Radisson Hotel, known now as the Graduate (on North Street just off the Fayetteville Square) to Mermaid's Restaurant, 2217 North College Avenue, in Fayetteville.

List of Women in History honorees by year of induction:[21]

1999: Laleh Amirmoez, Jesse B. Bryant, Doris Cook, Sylvia Swartz, and Elizabeth Woods.
2000: Mary Burton, Lodene Deffenbaugh, Lois Imhoff, Marie Parker, Trudy Scott and Olivia Sordo.
2001: Mary Ann Greenwood, Mary Ann Gunn, Dorothy Hamby, Marion Orton, and Wanda Stephens.
2002: Peg Anderson, Maryilynn Bell, Christine Childress, and Charlotte Forsythe.
2003: Sarah Burnside, Eunice Noland, Billie Joe Starr, and Bernice Jones.
2004: Margaret Clark, Genie Donovan, Marcia McCain, Diana Gonzales Worthen.
2005: Lynn Donald Carver, Faye Jones, Jan Judy, and Ellen Meenen.
2006: Martha Agee, Ivory Conley, Betty Lighton, and Gene Tweraser.
2007: Phyllis H. Johnson, Cynthia E. Nance, Berta J. Seitz, and Dorothy Sherwood.
2008: Gay Harp, Ann Rainwater Henry, Maurice Ash McClellan, Mary Alice Serafini, and Ann Wiggans Sugg.
2009: Patsy Brewer, Edith Hawkins, Bettie Lu Lancaster, Gail Segers, and Elizabeth Libby Wheeler.
2010: Doris Cassidy, Bonnie Cook, Denise Garner, Delores Stamps, and Donna Stjerna.
2011: Henrietta K. Holcomb, Bobbie Sue Jones, Julia Ann McKinney, Gail Pianalto, and Pat Walker.
2012: Joyce Hale, Lib Horn, Sue Madison, Jan Scroggs, and Bobbie Nell Templeton.
2013: Joyce Bunch, Ruth Cahoon, Ann Harbison, Carol Hart, and Lindsley Smith.
2014: Fran Alexander, Brenda Blagg, Bev Lewis, Barbara Lofton, and Peggy Parks.
2015: Kathy Grisham, Allyn Lord, Rita Miller, and Margarita Solorzano.
2016: Betty Bradford, Dr. Lisa Corrigan, Mary Bess Mulhollan, Jackee Smith, and Billee Yates.
2017: Marilyn Edwards, Nancy Kahanak, Nancy Mays, Mary Jane Silva,

Thelma Thomason, and Martha Ward.

2018: Carolyn Allen, Susan Averitt, Yolanda Fields, Diane McCready, and Susan Young.

2019: Daymara Barker, Dorothy Marcy, Mireya Reith, and Maudie Schmitt.

2020-2021:

A combined year as COVID-19 outbreak caused the 2020-2021 meetings to be cancelled. Susan Chase Bakker, Dr. Stephanie Ho, Sharon Killian, Charlotte Steele, and Nancy Wells.

2022: After the pandemic, a meeting was called and only one name was brought forward, as a surprise to the recipient Alice Ann Simkins. Simkins has been the treasurer of the group and one of its organizers for most of the last 25 years. Her award was a surprise to her, as she expected the 2020-2021 class members to be honored.

2023: Beverly Augustine, Dr. Lorraine Brewer, Paula Irwin, Dr. Angela Mosley-Monts, and Glenda Patterson, M.D.

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Endnotes

[1]Telephone interview with Berta Seitz, March 19, 2023.
[2]"Women's History Month," Wikipedia. Accessed March 20, 2023, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_History_Month
[3]"Five Pioneering Women Named," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, Tuesday March 30, 1999, pp. 1,11.
[4]Ibid.
[5]25th Anniversary Program, produced March 27, 2023, from Alice Ann Simkins, Women In History treasurer and board member.
[6]Interview with Seitz.
[7]25th Anniversary program of Women In History.
[8]Berta Seitz, from Berta Lena Seitz Papers, UofA Special Collections.
[9]Wanda Stephens. Accessed March 20, 2023, at https://prabook.com.
[10]Interview with Seitz.
[11]Ibid.
[12]"Five Pioneering Women."
[13]Author's personal records.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Polk's City Directory, 1939. Fayetteville Public Library.
[16]*Flashback* Vol. 69, No. 3 (Fall 2019), p. 121.
[17]"Five Pioneering Women."
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid.
[20]25th Anniversary program of Women In History.
[21]Ibid.

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